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ABSTRACT

The new communication order must be broad and pluralistic, encouraging a world-wide discussion of, by, and for the people, and must not be modeled on a narrow, news-information order that tends to polarize professional communicators and government officials. The central policy issue in this new communication order will be to insure that communication resources are made available to satisfy human communication needs in a way that is sensitive to the multicultural values of the right to communicate. This right to communicate encompasses the following three major areas: rights of association, information, and cultural evolution. Communication must be interactive and participatory; the right to participate is at the core of the right to communicate. The implementation of a right to communicate within a new communication order will require a substantial body of communication policy at world, national, and local levels. Communication policy science is emerging as a values-sensitive, problem-oriented, multi-method approach. (Diagrams of alternate communication models are included.) (DF)

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DISCUSSION DRAFT

Unesco Experts Meeting on the Right to Communicate

Stockholm, May 8-12, 1978

A note on

THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN A NEW WORLD COMMUNICATION ORDER

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Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has served as the common reference for dialog on and study of the right to communicate, and three attitudes toward that article have been apparent. Article 19 ought to be:

- °extended from an information right into a communication right; or
- °replaced with a substantially new formulation; and/or
- °implemented either in its present form or in some new formulation.

At least for the moment, the following paraphrase of Article 19 appears to encompass the first and second of these attitudes:

> Everyone has the right to communicate; this universal right includes but is not limited to these specific communication rights:
>
> - °a right to assemble, a right to participate, and related association rights;
> - °a right to inform, a right to be informed; and related information rights; and,
> - °a right to select, a right to privacy; and related cultural evolution rights.

But, the implementation of Article 19 either in its original form or in a new formulation appears to require a new communication order.

The phrase 'everyone has the right to communicate' extends the earlier 'everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression' while retaining the comprehensive and inclusive cultural thrust so necessary for continued dialog on what such a right ought to become. The remainder of the paraphrase introduces new content not included in Article 19. In particular, it includes association rights and sets them before information rights, and it follows information rights with what may be tentatively called cultural evolution rights.

The claim that communication must be interactive and participatory has been at the heart of the right to communicate dialog and study. For this reason, certain aspects of Article 20 on human association, particularly a right to assemble, have been included in the paraphrase of Article 19. Further, the widespread insistence on active participation in the communication process leads to a new communication right: a right to participate. The demand for interactive and participatory communication introduces a number of specific rights that can be organized under the general heading of association rights.

These association rights are of highest importance for both the small talk of everyday life and for the long-term dialog necessary to formulate the great ideas -- the right to communicate itself provides one convenient example for it has grown out of multicultural dialog.

The rights of association are of critical importance to the one-half of the world adults who are not literate, and to the very many poor persons who do not have access to needed information from any reliable means except through interpersonal communication -- which includes large numbers of the persons living in industrial city ghettos and in the third world regions.

Perhaps at least one half of the world's useful information is neither printed in books nor accessible through the world news information flow because it is stored only in other people's brains. In international discussions, this cerebrally stored information tends not to be regarded as information at all. Transceiver or teleconferencing technology can facilitate sharing of this essential information and experience. An enlarged view of information is also appropriate.

The second area of information rights has, in recent years and for reasons which are well known to us, received most of the attention. While Article 19 boldly claims that everyone has the right to 'seek, receive, and impart information', the critical examination of information imbalance leads to the observation that in practice Article 19 is a 'receive only' right. In retrospect, we know that mass media structures work in that way: there are a few sources, there are many receivers. As soon as transmitters were separated from receivers, the imbalance problem began.

The third area of cultural evolution rights is historically the newest, the least defined, and it impinges on cultural values most directly. It assumes that individuals in groups and groups of individuals have the right to select if, when, and how they participate in communication, that they have a right to privacy or to be let alone, that they can modulate the way in which the cultures of the world flow through their homes so that they are not blown off their feet by them. In sum, a culture has a right to evolve in terms of its own values without being swamped by information from the outside or deprived of the information needed to enrich its cultural traditions. In this sense, everyone has a right <u>not</u> to communicate.

Each of these three major rights areas -- and those specific rights that will be from time to time be included in them -- has contingent freedoms and responsibilities. As the balancing of freedoms and responsibilities is worked out in specific areas, issues of resource allocation must arise and these are dealt with either through implicit cultural values or explicit positive law, in short, through communication policy actions.

There remains the central question of how a right to communicate might be implemented. In his address to the Unesco International Commission for the Study of Communication problems, Sean McBride posed the question in these words:

°How might the right to communicate, with all of its ethical and legal implications, be achieved as a new line of thought and action in the whole of the communication field?

In this context, the terms achieved and implemented appear to mean about the same thing.

But, the terms information and communication do not mean the same thing.-- at least in English. In Japanese and other languages the choice of terms presents a different problem. In English, it is important to use the term communication especially when the central concern is interaction and participation.

The implementation of the right to communicate as discussed here will require a different way of doing things, a different order. That new and different way which insists that communication is fundamentally two-way may be called a new communication order.

The prospect of a new communication order invites consideration of other orders, both past and future. A quick look at human communication history suggests there have been several orders. If we assume that an order is concerned with how communication works in a society, then each order embodies notions of what communication is, what resources are required for it, and so on. A sequence of orders is set forth below as a context for a further consideration of a new communication order.

°Pre-conversation order, from about 4 million to .5 million years ago, where human brain size increased, articulatory and auditory mechanisms evolved appropriately and a long preparatory period functionally similar to babbling occurred.

°Conversation Order, from about .5 million years ago to the present, where interpersonal communication became possible for all human groups, especially in small task-oriented hunting groups and in pair-bonding dialog. During this long preliterate period, which is sometimes called the oral tradition, some of the greatest of human intellectual achievements occurred.

°Literacy Order, from 5,000 years ago to the present, where writing was first developed to record agreements, and thus became a first external information storage and transpersonal memory. Reading and writing were for a very time skills of a small elite, and perhaps half of the world's adults today do not yet know how to read and write and may never learn to do so.

°Mass Media Order, from 1870 to 1970, where a few sources provided duplicate messages for many receivers beginning with 100,000 run newspapers and million run books and continuing through radio and television broadcasting and reaching limits with the rejection of routine world-wide direct television broadcasting by satellite.

°New Communication Order, from about 1970 to 2020, where the interactive and oral patterns of the conversation order are revived and augmented by transceiver technology. The planet is interconnected by a world communication network and known to be interdependent by its inhabitants.

°Cosmic Order, from about 2020 to ?, where communicative contact is established with one or more extra terrestrial communicative intelligences.

°Post-cosmic Order, following the previous order, where. . . .
Across human communication history, communication orders come and go, and each of these orders irreversibly changes the communication possibilities of humankind.

This swift tracing of orders suggests that a transition from a mass media order to a new communication order is just beginning. The two simple models in Figure 1 symbolize the many changes now becomming apparent in the role communication plays in human society. More detailed models would be needed to provide a scholarly account of the transition, but the essential point would remain: human communication must be fundamentally two-way and participatory.

Throughout the mass media order, the core problem or paradigm was: Who said What to Whom through What Channels with What Effects? The emerging communication order asserts a toally different problem or paradigm: Humankind has the right to the communication resources required to satisfy human communication needs. Figure 2 displays the interrelationships suggested by that paradigm.

Note that a horizontal-interactive model is located in the middle of Figure 2 between the concepts of biosocial human communication needs and sociotechnical communication resources.

If a right to communicate is to be implemented within a new communication order, a substantial body of communication policy will have to be formulated and implemented -- at world, national and sub-national levels. Fortunately, there is emerging out of the activities in communication policy what can with some hope be called a communication policy science. As generally understood, that new science is values-sensitive, problem-oriented and multimethod. In other words, it does not fall neatly into any existing academic or agency pigeon hole; it develops from its own premises.

The values concerns of a communication policy science link it to the right to communicate concept. In an interdependent world, these values are multicultural and, more generally, these multicultural values are often considered Human Rights.

The problem orientation is most evident at the moment in the Unesco International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, but other instances are available as in the work of the East-West Communication Institute and the United Nations University.

Unfortunately, communication policy science has been multimethod in only a very narrow sense. The methods used for communication policy studies have been drawn from First World or Western social science. This matter becomes serious precisely because many of the current communication problems such as balanced information flow have been defined by and appear to be most severe in the Third World.

To build a balance not only in information flow but also in research methodologies, it will be necessary to develop new communication policy research methods from the intellectual traditions of several Third World cultural regions. While such a task would probably take at least a five-year commitment by scholars in several regions of the Third World, the development of even one new communication policy research method that could facilitate examination of the qualitative aspects of a world communication problem such as information balance would justify a major expenditure of time and effort.

In this note, I have intended only to continue the dialog and study on the right to communicate concept and to locate the concept within the framework of a new communication order. The right to communicate, with its emphasis on two-way interaction, establishes that the new order must be a broad and pluralistic communication order that encourages a world-wide discussion of the people, by the people, and for the people rather than a narrow news information order that tends to make adversaries of the professional communicators and government officials.

In the new communication order, the central policy problem is to assure that communication resources are made available to satisfy human communication needs in a way that is sensitive to the multicultural values of a right to communicate. At this time, a clearer formulation of those right to communicate values would facilitate the implementation of the right through a body of policy.

A next step in the development of the right to communicate is now possible. If care is taken to keep it flexible and open to new ideas, a 'working definition' of the right to communicate can now be attempted.

Figure 1. Alternate Communication Models

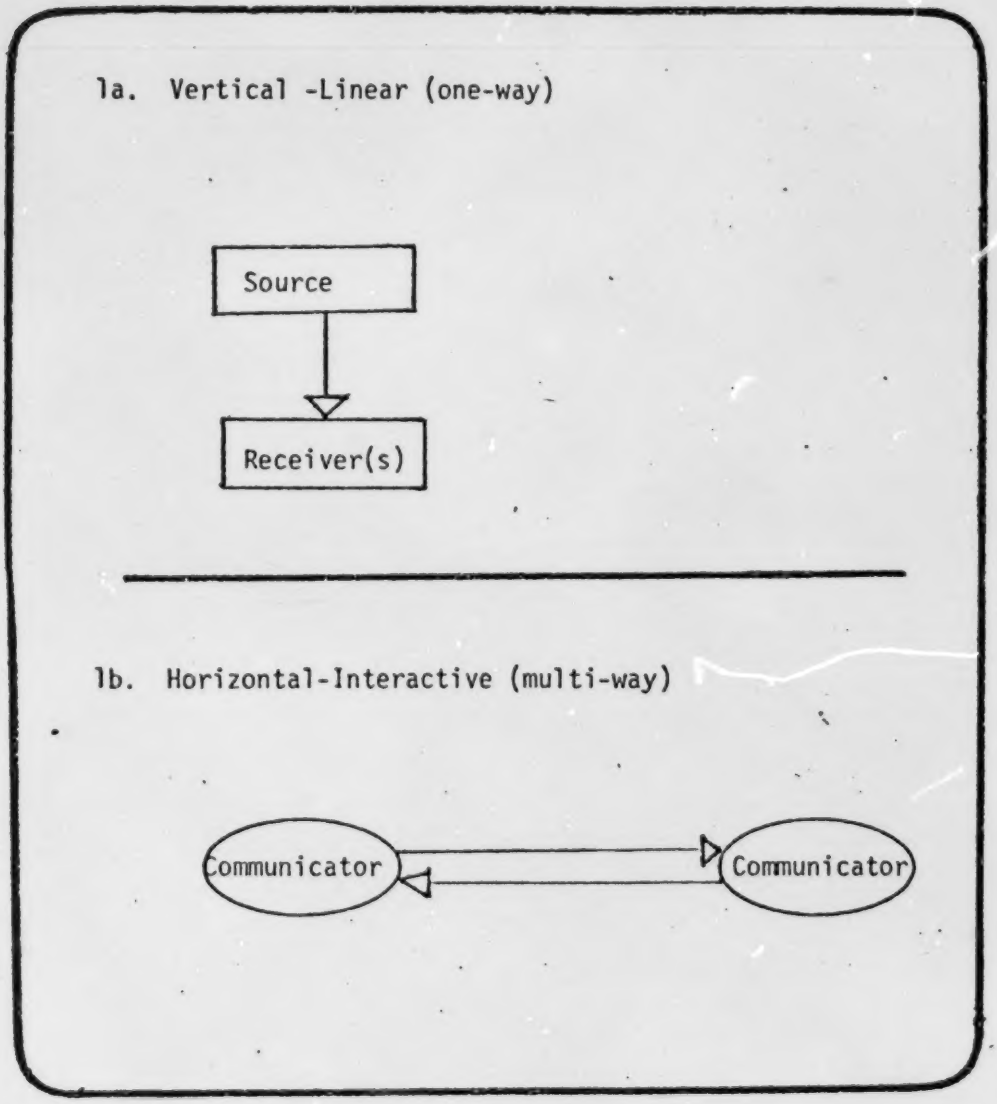

Figure 2. Essential Relationships in the New Communication Order